Study Guide for Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 5–9 and 7–12

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Praxis™ Study Guide for the Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 5–9 and 7–12
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Chapter 1
Introduction to the Test and Suggestions for Using This Study Guide
CHAPTER 1

**Introduction to Principles of Learning and Teaching**

The *Principles of Learning and Teaching* tests are designed to assess a beginning teacher’s knowledge of a broad range of job-related topics. Such knowledge is typically obtained in undergraduate courses in educational psychology, human growth and development, classroom management, instructional design and delivery techniques, evaluation and assessment, and other areas of professional preparation. Assessment professionals at Educational Testing Service (ETS), with the assistance of a national advisory committee, have aligned the content of these tests with several state and national standards documents including those of INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium). In developing assessment material for the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* tests, ETS works in collaboration with teacher educators, higher education content specialists, and accomplished practicing teachers to keep the test updated and representative of current standards and practices.

There are four different *Principles of Learning and Teaching* tests covering four different but overlapping grade ranges:

- **Early Childhood** *(Test Codes 0621/5621)*
- **Grades K–6** *(Test Codes 0622/5622)*
- **Grades 5–9** *(Test Codes 0623/5623)*
- **Grades 7–12** *(Test Codes 0624/5624)*

While the four tests cover the same topics and include materials common to all grade ranges, each test also features some material addressing the topics in ways appropriate to its particular grade range.

*This guide covers two of the four PLT tests: Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 5–9 and 7–12 (0623/5623 and 0624/5624).*

**The format and contents of the test**

**Format**

- Two case studies, each with two short-answer constructed-response questions
- Seventy multiple-choice questions; Test takers have two hours to complete the test
CHAPTER 1

Contents

A broad outline of the categories of topics covered in the PLT tests follows. Chapter 3 has a detailed outline of the topics covered under each category. The percentage shown below indicates approximately how much of your score is based on the topic category.

I. Students as Learners (30%)

II. Instructional Process (30%)

III. Assessment (20%)

IV. Professional Development, Leadership and Community (20%)

Suggestions for Using This Study Guide

Why should you use this study guide?

This test is different from a final exam or other tests you may have taken for other courses, because it is comprehensive—that is, it covers material you may have learned in several courses during more than one year. It requires you to synthesize information you have learned from many sources and to understand the subject as a whole.

This test is also different from the SAT® or other assessments of your reading, writing, and mathematical skills. You may have heard it said that you can’t study for the SAT—that you should have learned these skills throughout your school years, and you can’t learn these skills just before you take the exam. You can practice taking the SAT and skills tests like it; you can become more adept at applying your reading, writing, and mathematical skills to the particular format of tests like the SAT.

However, the Principles of Learning and Teaching tests assess a domain of knowledge and understanding that is more than a set of skills. Therefore, you should review for and prepare for it, not merely practice answering the sample questions included in this study guide. A thorough review of the material covered on the test will significantly increase your likelihood of success.

Moreover, studying for your licensing exam is a great opportunity to reflect on and develop a deeper understanding of pedagogical knowledge and methods before you begin to teach. As you prepare to take the test, it may be particularly helpful for you to think about how you would apply the study topics and sample exercises to the clinical experience in schools that you obtained during your teacher preparation program. Your student teaching experience will be especially relevant to your thinking about the materials in the study guide.
CHAPTER 1

How can you best use the “Study Topics” chapter of this study guide?

- **Become familiar with the test content.** Learn what will be tested, as covered in chapter 3. It is quite likely that you will need to study in most or all of the areas. After you learn what the test contains, you should assess your knowledge in each area. How well do you know the material? In which areas do you need to learn more before you take the test?

- **Familiarize yourself with test taking.** Chapters 5 and 7 are designed to answer frequently asked questions about the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* tests, such as whether it is a good idea to guess on a test. You can simulate the experience of the test by taking the practice test in chapter 5 (constructed-response) or chapter 8 (multiple-choice) within the specified time limits. Choose a time and place where you will not be interrupted or distracted. Then you can use chapter 6 to see sample responses to the constructed-response test and how they were scored; or you can use chapter 9 to score your multiple-choice responses. The scoring key in chapter 9 identifies which topic each question addresses, so you can see which areas are your strongest and weakest. Look over the explanations of the questions you missed and see whether you understand them and could answer similar questions correctly. Then plan any additional studying according to what you’ve learned about your understanding of the topics.

- **Register for the test and consider last-minute tips.** Review the checklist in chapter 10 to make sure you are ready for the test.

What you do between the first step and these last steps depends on whether you intend to use this book to prepare on your own or as part of a class or study group.

**Using this book to prepare on your own**

If you are working by yourself to prepare for a *Principles of Learning and Teaching* test, you may find it helpful to use the following approach:

- **Fill out the Study Plan Sheet in appendix A.** This worksheet will help you to focus on what topics you need to study most, identify materials that will help you study, and set a schedule for doing the studying. The last item is particularly important if you know you tend to put off work.

- **Identify study materials.** Most of the material covered by the test is contained in standard introductory textbooks in the field. If you do not own introductory texts, you may want to borrow some from friends or from a library. Use standard introductory textbooks and other reliable, professionally prepared materials. Don’t rely heavily on information provided by friends or from searching the Internet. Neither of these sources is as uniformly reliable as textbooks.

- **Work through your study plan.** Work through the topics and questions provided in chapter 3. Be able to define and discuss the topics in your own words rather than memorizing definitions from books.
CHAPTER 1

Using this book as part of a study group

People who have a lot of studying to do sometimes find it helpful to form a study group with others who are preparing toward the same goal. Study groups give members opportunities to ask questions and get detailed answers. In a group, some members usually have a better understanding of certain topics, while others in the group may be better at other topics. As members take turns explaining concepts to each other, everyone builds self-confidence. If the group encounters a question that none of the members can answer well, the members can go as a group to a teacher or other expert and get answers efficiently.

Because study groups schedule regular meetings, group members study in a more disciplined fashion. They also gain emotional support. The group should be large enough so that various people can contribute various kinds of knowledge, but small enough so that it stays focused. Often, three to six people is a good size.

Here are some ways to use this book as part of a study group:

- **Plan the group’s study program.** Parts of the Study Plan Sheet in appendix A can help to structure your group’s study program. By filling out the first five columns and sharing the worksheets, everyone will learn more about your group’s mix of abilities and about the resources (such as textbooks) that members can share with the group. In the sixth column (“Dates planned for study of content”), you can create an overall schedule for your group’s study program.

- **Plan individual group sessions.** At the end of each session, the group should decide what specific topics will be covered at the next meeting and who will be the presenter of each topic. Use the topic headings and subheadings in chapter 3 to select topics. Some sessions might be based on the topics outlined in these chapters; other sessions might be based on the questions from these chapters.

- **Prepare your presentation for the group.** When it’s your turn to present, prepare something that’s more than a lecture. If you are presenting material from chapter 3, write five to ten original questions to pose to the group. Practicing writing actual questions can help you better understand the topics covered on the test as well as the types of questions you will encounter on the test. It will also give other members of the group extra practice at answering questions. If you are presenting material from the sample questions, use each sample question as a model for writing at least one original question.

- **Take the practice tests together.** The idea of chapters 5 and 8 is to simulate actual administrations of the test, so scheduling a test session with the group will add to the realism and will also help boost everyone’s confidence.
CHAPTER 1

- **Learn from the results of the practice test.** Use chapter 6 or chapter 9 to score each other’s answer sheets. Then plan one or more study sessions based on the questions that group members got wrong or (on the constructed-response sample test) did not answer well. For example, each group member might be responsible for a question that he or she got wrong and could use it as a model to create an original question to pose to the group, together with an explanation of the correct answer modeled after the explanations in chapter 9.

Whether you decide to study alone or with a group, remember that the best way to prepare is to have an organized plan. The plan should set goals based on specific topics and skills that you need to learn, and it should commit you to a realistic set of deadlines for meeting these goals. Then you need to discipline yourself to stick with your plan and accomplish your goals on schedule.

**What’s the best way to use the chapters on case studies and multiple-choice questions?**

- **Sharpen your skills on short-answer questions.** Read chapter 4 to understand how short-answer questions are scored and how to write high-scoring responses.

- **Read chapter 7.** This chapter will sharpen your skills in reading and answering multiple-choice questions. Succeeding on multiple-choice questions requires careful focus on the question, attention to detail, and patient sifting of the answer choices.
CHAPTER 1

What’s the best way to use the practice-test chapters?

- **Answer the short-answer questions.** Work on the practice cases and short-answer questions in chapter 5, then review the scoring materials and sample responses in chapter 6. This is not a test of your writing ability, so a response in an essay format is not required. You may use short descriptions or phrases, as long as your ideas are clear and you support your ideas with relevant examples and details where appropriate.

- **Answer the practice multiple-choice questions.** Work on the practice questions in chapter 8, then go through the detailed answers in chapter 9 and mark the questions you answered correctly and the ones you missed. Look over the explanations of the questions you missed and see if you understand them.

- **Decide whether you need more review.** After you have looked at your results, decide if there are areas that you need to brush up on before taking the actual test. Go back to your textbooks and reference materials to see if the topics are covered there. You might also want to go over your questions with a friend or teacher who is familiar with the subjects.

- **Assess your readiness.** Do you feel confident about your level of understanding in each of the subject areas? If not, where do you need more work? If you feel ready, complete the checklist in chapter 10 to double-check that you’ve thought through the details. If you need more information about registration or the testing situation itself, use the resources in appendix B: “For More Information.”

It is important to remember that the sample test questions provide only a representation of the kinds of questions you will see on the test; *they are not the actual questions you will encounter* when you take the test. It is important, therefore, to treat the sample questions as inspiration for study and to study the ideas represented by the sample questions and by the topics described in chapter 3.
Chapter 2
Background Information on The Praxis Series™ Assessments
CHAPTER 2

What Are The Praxis Series Assessments?

The Praxis Series™ Assessments are designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to assess your
knowledge of teaching, and they are a part of the licensing requirements in many states. This study guide
covers an assessment that is a licensing requirement. Your state has adopted The Praxis Series tests because
it wants to be certain that you have received, retained, and understood appropriate teacher preparation before
it grants you a license to teach in a classroom.

The Praxis Series tests are part of a national testing program, meaning that the test covered in this study
guide is used in more than one state. The advantage of taking Praxis™ tests is that if you want to move
to another state that uses The Praxis Series tests, you can transfer your scores to that state. Passing scores
are set by states, however, so if you are planning to apply for licensure in another state, you may find that
passing scores are different. You can find passing scores for all states that use The Praxis Series tests in the
Understanding Your Praxis Scores pamphlet, available online at www.ets.org/praxis, in your college’s school
of education, or by calling 800-772-9476 or 609-771-7395.

What Is Licensure?

Licensure in any area—medicine, law, architecture, accounting, cosmetology—is an assurance to the public
that the person holding the license has demonstrated evidence of a certain level of competence. In the case of
teacher licensing, a license tells the public that the person holding the license has demonstrated evidence that
she or he can be trusted to educate children competently and professionally.

Because a license makes such a serious claim about its holder, licensure tests are usually quite demanding.
In some fields licensure tests have more than one part and last for more than one day. Candidates for
licensure in all fields plan intensive study as part of their professional preparation. In preparation for the
tests, some join study groups while others study alone. But preparing to take a licensure test is, in all cases,
a professional activity. Because it assesses your entire body of knowledge or skill for the field you want to
enter, preparing for a licensure exam takes planning, discipline, and sustained effort. Studying thoroughly is
highly recommended.

Why Does My State Require The Praxis Series Assessments?

Your state chose The Praxis Series assessments because the tests assess the breadth and depth of content
that your state wants its teachers to possess before they begin to teach. The level of knowledge, reflected in
the passing score for each test, is based on recommendations of panels of teachers and teacher educators in
each area in each state. The state licensing agency and, in some states, the state legislature ratify the passing
scores that have been recommended by panels of teachers.
You can find out the passing score required for The Praxis Series assessments in your state by looking in the Understanding Your Praxis Scores pamphlet, which is free from ETS (see page 9). If you look through this pamphlet, you will see that not all states use the same tests and even when they do, the passing scores can differ from state to state.

**What Kinds of Tests Are The Praxis Series Assessments?**

Two kinds of questions appear in The Praxis Series assessments: multiple-choice (for which you select your answer from a list of choices) and constructed response (for which you write a response of your own). Multiple-choice tests can survey a wider domain because they can ask more questions in a limited period of time. Constructed-response tests have far fewer questions, but the questions require you to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge in the area covered.

**What Do the Tests Measure?**

The Praxis Series assessments measure your understanding of knowledge important to teaching. The multiple-choice tests measure a broad range of knowledge across your content area. The constructed-response tests measure your ability to explain in depth a few essential topics in your area.

The pedagogy tests, most of which are constructed-response, measure your understanding of concepts fundamental to teaching. The tests do not measure your actual teaching ability, however. They measure your knowledge of how to teach it. The teachers who help us design and write these tests, and the states that require these tests, do so in the belief that knowledge of teaching is the first requirement for licensing.

Your teaching ability is a skill that is measured in other ways: observation, videotaped teaching, or portfolios are typically used by states to measure teaching ability. Teaching combines many complex skills, only some of which can be measured by a single test.

**How Were These Tests Developed?**

ETS began the development of The Praxis Series assessments with a survey. For each test, teachers around the country in various teaching situations were asked to judge which knowledge and skills a beginning teacher needs to possess. Professors in schools of education who prepare teachers were asked the same questions. These responses were ranked in order of importance and sent out to hundreds of teachers for review. All of the responses to these surveys (called “job analysis survey”) were analyzed to summarize the judgments of these professionals. From their consensus, we developed the specifications for the multiple-choice and constructed-response tests. The specification for each assessment were written by a committee of practicing teachers and teacher educators and then were reviewed and eventually approved by teachers. On the basis of the test specifications, groups of teachers and professional test developers created test questions.
CHAPTER 2

How Were These Tests Chosen as Part of My State’s Licensure Requirements?

When your state adopted *The Praxis Series* assessments, local panels of practicing teachers and teacher educators met to examine the tests question by question and evaluate each question for its relevance to beginning teachers in your state. This is called a validity study. A test is considered valid for a job if it measures what people must know and be able to do on that job. For the test to be adopted in your state, teachers in your state must judge that it is valid.

These teachers and teacher educators also performed a standard-setting study; that is, they went through the tests question by question and decided, through a rigorous process, how many questions a beginning teacher should be able to answer correctly. From this study emerged a recommended passing score. The final passing score was approved by your state’s licensing agency.

In other words, throughout the development process, practitioners in the teaching field—teachers and teacher educators—have determined what the tests would contain. The practitioners in your state determined which tests would be used for licensure and helped decide what score would be needed to achieve licensure. This is how professional licensure works in most fields: those who are already licensed oversee the licensing of new practitioners. When you pass *The Praxis Series* assessments, you and the practitioners in your state can be assured that you have the knowledge required to begin practicing your profession.